

Africa Sugar Lobby Behind Favors to Hill

By Robert L. Jackson
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South African sugar interests acknowledged yesterday they had secretly financed trips and political donations for members of Congress over a five-year period in violation of House rules.

In papers filed with the Justice Department to settle a long-pending lawsuit, South African lobbyists said they had sought to conceal their role from the public "to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest on the part of these congressmen."

But the legislators, mostly members of the House Agriculture Committee who helped set U.S. limits on foreign sugar imports; generally knew that African sugar interests were secretly providing the favors, the lobbyists said.

Members of Congress or aides reached for comment denied the charges, saying they knew only that an organization called the South Africa Foundation had provided them with airfare, lodging or other benefits.

Representatives of the foundation and an affiliated group, the South African Sugar Association, said the principal recipients were Reps. W.R. Poage (D-Tex.), then chairman of the Agriculture Committee; John J. Flynt Jr. (D-Ga.), chairman of the Standards of Official Conduct Committee, and William C. Wampler (Va.), ranking Republican on the Agriculture Committee.

The lobbyists' statements were filed as part of a consent decree between the Justice Department and the South Africa Foundation, whose U.S. agent was the New York law firm of Casey, Lane & Mittendorf.

The department had charged the foundation and law firm with having filed false and misleading documents under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act. The defendants agreed to avoid future violations without admitting or denying that they had breached the act.

Congressional rules forbid a member from receiving gifts of \$100 or more "directly or indirectly from any person having a direct interest in legislation before the Congress, or who is a foreign national or agent of a foreign national."

Lobbyist John R. Mahoney said the South African Sugar Association used the nonprofit foundation as a cover and flew Poage from Rhodesia to South Africa by executive jet in 1971 and 1972.

In addition, the sugar lobby gave Poage \$1,800 worth of airline tickets so he could take 10 round trips from Washington to his district, the law firm said. The tickets were given to Poage "in the name of a nominee," as was a \$1,000 campaign contribution funneled through the firm, Mahoney and the firm told the Justice Department.

According to an aide, Poage accepted the tickets as a campaign contribution without knowing that the sugar association was behind them or his trips to South Africa.

However, the law firm told the Justice Department that "Mahoney believes that ... Poage and ... several of the congressmen were aware" that the actual host was the sugar association.

Others who accompanied Poage on the 1971 trip were Rep. Kika de la Garza (D-Tex.) and former representative George Goodling (R-Pa.).

De la Garza said through an aide that he knew nothing about the financing of that trip because Poage handled all arrangements. Goodling could not be reached.

Flynt and his wife were flown to South Africa for a 1972 visit at a cost of \$3,100, the sugar lobbyists said. Again, they said they used the foundation as a cover.

Flynt could not be reached for comment, but has said previously that he reimbursed the foundation and did not know his trip was sponsored by sugar interests.